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Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2391 (2017) of 8 December 2017, the Security Council welcomed the progress achieved in the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. It requested me, in close coordination with the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) States (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force, focusing on progress in its operationalization, international support for the Joint Force, the implementation of the technical agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and G-5 Sahel States, the challenges encountered by the Joint Force and the implementation by the G-5 Sahel of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework and the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces.

II. Operationalization of the Joint Force

2. During the reporting period, pursuant to resolution 2391 (2017), the G-5 Sahel countries, supported by their international partners, continued efforts to fully operationalize the Joint Force. However, amid important equipment and training shortfalls, the deadline for attaining full operational capability had to be postponed twice; a new timeline has not yet been defined The deadly terrorist attack on the headquarters of the Joint Force, in Sévaré, Mali, on 29 June 2018, dealt a significant blow to efforts aimed at accelerating the full operationalization of the Joint Force and led to a temporary halt of its operations. Following the attack, the new leadership of the Joint Force conducted a series of assessments with a view to defining the strategic and geographic orientation of the Joint Force, in order to determine the scope, location and timelines of its operations, once they resume.

3. Among important political developments, the peaceful holding of presidential elections in Mali in August 2018, along with the holding of legislative, regional and municipal elections in Mauritania in September, were crucial steps towards strengthening democratic institutions in the region. The re-election in Mali of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the signing of the Pact for Peace in Mali on 15 October provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the Malian peace process and to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and the road map agreed upon by the Government and signatory armed groups on

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22 March. The intensification of efforts to restore and expand State authority in Mali, to foster reconciliation and national cohesion and to carry out critical institutional reforms, including security sector and decentralization reform, will contribute to identifying lasting political solutions to address the root causes of instability in the Sahel region. However, important governance shortfalls and the limited presence of State authority in the Liptako-Gourma area continue to undermine the people's trust in their representatives and hamper the provision of basic social services. The humanitarian situation in the Sahel remains dire and continues to be exacerbated by increasing insecurity and the effects of climate change.

4. The security context in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger and the central corridor of the Joint Force's area of operations has deteriorated rapidly over the last six months. On 1 May 2018, assailants attacked civilian camps in Taylanen and Tindibawen, near the border with the Niger, killing 16 people. On 29 June, the headquarters of the Joint Force came under a complex attack, later claimed by the al-Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, during which a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device breached the barrier of the camp, resulting in the death of two soldiers and serious material damage. On 18 July, a joint mission of the Joint Force and the armed forces of Mali came under attack near N'Tillit, in the border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. On 22 August, assailants attacked and ransacked the police station in Solle, in northern Burkina Faso, killing one police officer. On 5 September, an armed group attacked civilian camps in Tinipchi village, on the border between Mali and the Niger, killing 27 people. On 3 October, armed individuals attacked the gendarmerie of Inata, in Soum province, in northern Burkina Faso, killing one policeman and wounding another. On 5 October, several police officers from Burkina Faso were killed when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device near the border with Mali.

5. In Burkina Faso, in the north, east and southwest of the country, attacks against security and other State personnel, State institutions and public facilities have intensified in recent months. In a particularly disconcerting development, increasing violence was documented in the northeast, along the border with the Niger, as well as in Tillabéri and Tahoua, in the Niger, where a state of emergency continues to be in place. An unprecedented number of asymmetric attacks against local defence and security forces, as well as against the civilian population, were documented during the reporting period. Those attacks suggest that terrorist groups have established themselves in a region well outside the primary areas of operations of international armed forces and the armed forces of G-5 Sahel countries. The Government of Burkina Faso launched a counter-terrorism operation in the east of the country, in addition to similar efforts that are ongoing in the north. In October 2018, opposition leaders and civil society activists held demonstrations in Ouagadougou, denouncing the Government's inability to provide security.

6. On 11 August 2018, a Chadian rebel group based in Libya attacked two Chadian army positions in northern Chad in the first significant cross-border attack by a Chadian rebel group since 2009. The attack, perpetrated by Conseil de commandement militaire pour le salut de la République, occurred 35 kilometres south of the border with Libya, in Kouri Bougouri. The rebels overran two positions, resulting in the Chadian military sending reinforcements that pursued the rebels back across the border.

7. On 26 September 2018, in the margins of the general debate of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, the United Nations hosted a high-level event on Mali and the Sahel, which was co-chaired by the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the G-5 Sahel, the European Union, the United Nations, France and Algeria. At the event, the G-5 Sahel countries reiterated their commitment to operationalizing the Joint Force as quickly as possible,

but stressed that the lack of predictable financing and shortfalls in equipment and capacity were responsible for the delays incurred. Representatives of donor countries reiterated their support for the Joint Force and urged G-5 Sahel countries to accelerate force generation efforts. In September, in their respective addresses to the General Assembly, President Keita and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, Alpha Barry, urged the Security Council to place the Joint Force under a Chapter VII mandate in order to ensure continuous support and funding. Minister Barry noted that, over the last three years, in Burkina Faso alone, terrorism had claimed more than 200 victims and led to the closure of over 520 schools, depriving some 56,000 children of an education.

A. Deployment update: military component

8. On 9 May 2018, the Defence and Security Committee of the G-5 Sahel convened its sixth ordinary session, in Ouagadougou. The chiefs of defence staff of G-5 Sahel countries expressed concern at the rising terrorist threat in the region and its implications for regional and international peace and security. They approved and adopted all framework documents and guiding principles for the operationalization of the Joint Force, notably on its operational structure, as well as concrete steps aimed at establishing its police component. On 13 May, the Ministers of Defence of the G-5 Sahel countries met in Ouagadougou and endorsed the outcomes of the sixth ordinary session of the Defence and Security Committee. They also requested the Committee to conduct, ahead of its next session, scheduled to take place in November in Bamako, a strategic review that would analyse the challenges in the environment in which the Joint Forces operates.

9. During the reporting period, troop deployment continued to be slowed by the absence of secure and fortified operating bases, capacity and equipment shortfalls and the multiple, overlapping demands placed on the armed and security forces of the G-5 Sahel countries. However, as at 26 October 2018, 80 per cent of troops had been deployed across the three Sectors (West, Central and East). The transfer of authority was concluded for all Sectors and command posts of the Joint Force in October 2018. However, given the lack of important equipment and infrastructure, the severity and aftermath of the Sévaré attack, and the appointment of a new Joint Force Commander, the deadline for attaining full operational capacity had to be postponed twice during the reporting period. A new date for the deadline still needs to be determined.

10. Between May and June 2018, the Joint Force carried out four operations. Operation Irgoka took place from 18 to 30 May in the area between Markoye, in Burkina Faso, and Ouanzerbéand Inates, in the Niger. The operation involved two inter-army detachments from Burkina Faso and the Niger under Joint Force command, in coordination with the armed forces of those two countries, as well as with Operation Barkhane. The central command post in Sévaré directed the operation, with support of the tactical command post and Sector Central headquarters in Niamey. From 13 to 24 June, the Joint Force carried out Operation Gourma in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, with the participation of two inter-army battalions from each of the three countries, and with the objective of disrupting the supply chains of terrorist and criminal groups and of reassuring the population living in that area. From 1 to 12 July, the Joint Force simultaneously conducted Operation Odossou along the northern border between Chad and the Niger, in Sector East, and Operation El Emel in Sector West. The command post for Sector East, temporarily located in N'Djamena, along with two inter-army battalions from Chad and the Niger, provided assistance for Operation Odossou. Operation El Emel was carried out by two Mauritanian battalions, with the objective of neutralizing

terrorist armed groups present in the area extending from southern Bassikounou, in Mauritania, to northern Nampala, in Mali.

11. The attack on Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré on 29 June 2018 inflicted severe damage on its premises. The information and communications room was destroyed, and sensitive documents and archives were damaged. Consequently, tactical liaison and coordination with the army headquarters of the respective G-5 Sahel countries were disrupted. Since then, Joint Force headquarters staff have been scattered between Sévaré and Bamako, which has had a serious impact on planning and communication capabilities. As a result, and following the change in leadership, Joint Force operations were temporarily halted; they are projected to resume in December. In the margins of the swearing-in ceremony of President Keita on 22 September, the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries decided to temporarily relocate the headquarters of the Joint Force to Bamako. Immediately after the attack, the European Union and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) provided emergency information and communication materials.

12. On 25 October 2018, the Defence and Security Committee convened an extraordinary session in Niamey and decided to permanently relocate the headquarters of the Joint Force to Bamako and requested Malian authorities to identify a suitable site. The European Union offered its support, through one of its contractors, Expertise France, for the reconstruction of the Joint Force's headquarters, once its location has been confirmed.

13. On 12 July 2018, Brigadier General Hanena Ould Sidi of Mauritania was appointed Commander of the Joint Force, replacing Brigadier General Didier Dacko of Mali, who had served in that capacity since June 2017. On 4 September, in the margins of his visit to Mali, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, along with my Special Representative for Mali, met with the new Commander and the Permanent Secretary of the G-5 Sahel. The Commander indicated that he intended to conduct comprehensive inspections of each battalion to ensure their compliance with the standards set pursuant to the strategic concept of operations and to further determine and clarify the nature and scope of needs at the command posts.

14. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on Joint Force headquarters, the construction and fortification of Joint Force operating bases in order to protect personnel, arms, ammunition, equipment and supplies has become an ever more pressing objective. The Joint Force is developing a new priority plan for the construction and fortification of its camps, most of which are operating in precarious conditions. In his presentation on 26 September 2018 at the high-level event on Mali and the Sahel, the Commander of the Joint Force estimated the cost of construction and reinforcement of the Joint Force's 14 camps at approximatively 80 million euros.

15. Following the attack on 11 August 2018 by Libya-based Chadian rebel groups on two Chadian army positions in the north of the country, Chad decided that the Sector East headquarters of the Joint Force, currently located in N'Djamena, and the Chadian battalion for Sector East, would be permanently relocated to Wour, near the northern frontier of the country. The Operation Barkhane force announced that it would support the redeployment of the battalion, while the European Union indicated that it would fund the construction of the new Sector East headquarters.

16. The Joint Force continues to face important training, capability and equipment shortfalls. The lack of individual protection equipment and armoured vehicles, the threat of improvised explosive devices, along with non-existent logistical supply chains to transport fuel and rations from MINUSMA bases to Joint Force command

posts, constitute major challenges and have delayed the resumption of Joint Force operations.

17. In response to a request for support by the Joint Force, the United Nations Mine Action Service developed a project proposal to build capacity across all G-5 Sahel countries to manage the asymmetric threat posed by explosive hazards. In mid-July 2018, in Nouakchott, the Permanent Secretary and the Joint Force Commander reiterated their endorsement of the proposed project as a prerequisite for the operationalization of the Joint Force. It was subsequently presented to the European Union coordination hub on 11 September and will be presented at the next meeting of the Defence and Security Committee in Bamako in November for final endorsement.

18. From 23 to 26 October, the European Union Training Mission in Mali and the Alioune Blondin Bey Peacekeeping School held a high-level workshop in Bamako for the incoming and outgoing chiefs of the three command posts, ahead of their rotation, as well as staff officers and advisers deployed to the headquarters of the Joint Force. Participants were briefed on the Joint Force's operational and security environment and the legal framework for its activities. The seminar also provided a valuable opportunity for the sharing of experiences among the officers in advance of their rotation.

B. Deployment update: police and civilian component

19. On 9 May 2018, the Defence and Security Committee validated the terms of reference for the Police Adviser, who is based at Joint Force headquarters and whose role it is to provide overall coordination of the police component. The Defence and Security Committee also validated the organizing principles for integration of and collaboration among the specialized investigation units and provost brigades within national security and judicial frameworks. The new police adviser, Abdellahi Sidi Aly, a Mauritanian national, was appointed on 7 August.

20. At the request of the Defence and Security Committee and with support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), assessment missions to the G-5 Sahel countries were conducted. They were led by the Director-General of the National Police of the Niger and comprised representatives of the police and gendarmerie of the Niger, of the Joint Force, including the new police adviser, and of the permanent secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, along with experts from, inter alia, the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Niger, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNODC. The team visited Niamey on 30 and 31 July, Ouagadougou on 1 and 2 August, N'Djamena on 15 and 16 August, Bamako on 13 and 14 September, and Nouakchott on 10 and 11 October 2018. The objective of the missions was to mobilize support for the operationalization of the police component at the national level through awareness-raising sessions with the highest relevant national authorities and discussions on specific training and equipment needs. Delegations met with Ministers of Interior, Defence, Justice and the line ministries in charge of G-5 Sahel-related issues and conducted technical discussions with relevant national authorities, including the police and gendarmerie, and representatives of the justice system.

21. Following the assessment missions, the Government of the Niger established an investigation unit in Bankilaré as part the police component for Sector Central, as a satellite location of the Niger central service for the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime, and deployed 15 judicial police officers there in September 2018. Furthermore, ongoing reconnaissance missions are preparing for the

establishment of a second investigation unit in Madama, in the Niger, in Sector East. In Burkina Faso, a decree was signed in September to set up a special investigation brigade for investigating terrorism and organized crime. The Government of Chad signed a decree creating the specialized investigation unit for the police component and has designated more 60 officers to join that unit and receive training. The unit will have a satellite location in Wour, in Sector East. In Mali, the specialized judicial unit intends to open satellite locations that will serve as investigation units for the police component. The Government of Mauritania plans to assign 20 law enforcement officers from specialized counterterrorism and drug control services to the investigation unit, which will be established near the Joint Force command post in Sector West.

22. Following the missions, participants recommended strengthening cooperation between law enforcement and justice authorities through the use of existing tools and mechanisms such as the G-5 Sahel Security Cooperation Platform and the Sahel Judicial Platform. They also recommended that Burkina Faso and Mauritania sign onto a justice cooperation agreement previously signed by Chad, Mali and the Niger in May 2017, the aim of which has been to strengthen border controls between the three countries and enhance cooperation in tackling transnational organized crime.

23. On 23 July 2018, INTERPOL held a meeting at its headquarters in Lyon, France, with the heads of police of the G-5 Sahel countries. The discussions focused on three key areas where INTERPOL could provide assistance to the Joint Force: (a) establishing a framework for information-sharing; (b) ensuring that relevant criminal information generated by Joint Force operations and investigations can be cross-checked and recorded in INTERPOL global databases; and (c) providing specialized and operational support for data analysis. INTERPOL and the G-5 Sahel countries agreed to continue to enhance their strategic partnership and dialogue in the three aforementioned areas.

24. From 17 to 21 September 2018, the Sahel Security College and the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Mali held a workshop attended by representatives of the judiciary, military and gendarmerie from the G-5 Sahel countries to define the roles and responsibilities of the provost police officers who are to be integrated into Joint Force battalions. Participants recommended the development of joint guidance and specialized training for the provost corps in the Joint Force.

C. Permanent secretariat

25. The G-5 Sahel has continued to pursue efforts to restructure its secretariat to meet its operational demands, including those related to the operationalization of the Joint Force, its growing partnerships and development aspects, in particular those related to the implementation of the priority investment plan. Following a directive of the Council of Ministers, the permanent secretariat is now conducting an organizational audit to determine the duties of new staffing positions in line with the demands of its workload. As an interim measure, the permanent secretariat received staffing support from the European Union and several United Nations system entities, including UNODC, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and MINUSMA. Chad deployed a military officer to the Security and Defence Bureau of the permanent secretariat. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger have nominated finance, audit and procurement officers, who are to be deployed shortly.

III. Human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework

26. In its resolution 2391 (2017), the Security Council underlined the need for the operations of the Joint Force to be conducted in full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, as applicable. It called upon the G-5 Sahel States to establish a "robust compliance framework" to prevent, investigate, address and publicly report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. During the reporting period, OHCHR, MINUSMA and the Joint Force continued to work on the establishment of the framework, which was launched at a high-level workshop held in Bamako on 7 and 8 May 2018. The framework consists of a number of mechanisms and measures to prevent, mitigate and address violations and represents a pioneering approach to the integration of human rights into the new peace and security architecture. Its objective is to ensure that human rights is fully taken into account in security responses addressing new types of violence and conflict, including terrorism. Those measures involve criteria for selecting and screening troops, training troops and commanding officers, developing doctrine and standard operating procedures, including on arrest and detention, and improving responses to violations.

27. A technical advisory team from OHCHR and a child protection officer from MINUSMA were deployed to Sévaré in May 2018 to support the leadership of the Joint Force in the implementation of the compliance framework. The team worked closely with all the technical actors that contribute directly or indirectly to the establishment of the compliance framework, including MINUSMA, UNODC, the Center for Civilians in Conflict, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Mali and the Operation Barkhane force.

28. From 3 to 5 July 2018, the Joint Force, with support from the European Union Training Mission in Mali, OHCHR and the Alioune Blondin Beye Peacekeeping School, held a workshop on the Joint Force's training plan, with a view to agreeing on priority training targets and specialized topics for Joint Force officers and the police component, in order to contextualize and tailor training requirements to the operational environment. The training targets also included the identification of next steps for operationalizing the police component and its provost corps.

29. From July to September 2018, an OHCHR technical advisory team and Joint Force staff officers conducted joint visits to all G-5 Sahel countries. They conducted a series of awareness-raising and pre-deployment activities on the compliance framework, in conjunction with the respective army headquarters and sector and field units. Specifically, the teams reviewed existing selection and screening standards and processes, as well as relevant pre-deployment training systems and plans in each country. They also conducted a lessons-learned exercise with respect to the protection of citizens as part of six Joint Force operations, along with a training session on the integration of civilian protection into the planning and conduct of operations for army headquarters and sector and field units.

30. From 16 to 27 July 2018, 30 Joint Force commanding officers received integrated training in Bamako, with the support of technical partners such as the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Mali, ICRC and MINUSMA and OHCHR. During the training, OHCHR focused on raising awareness among field commanders regarding the compliance framework applicable to the Joint Force.

31. During the reporting period, MINUSMA investigated serious human rights violations related to the operations of the Joint Force, while using the information

resulting from its monitoring activities to help strengthen the response by authorities and the Joint Force to violations. MINUSMA also supported the Malian authorities in investigating the killing of 12 civilians, on 19 May, by elements of the Malian armed forces under Joint Force command, in Boulikessi, in the Mopti region, allegedly in retaliation for the killing of one soldier. MINUSMA also supported the in-situ investigation by the Joint Force into the incident, the results of which were shared with the Ministry of Defence. On 7 June, the Ministry of Defence declared that "grey areas" remained after the Joint Force's investigation and opened its own investigation into the matter. As a precautionary measure, on 13 June, the Ministry of Defence ordered the transfer of the contingent concerned to Bamako, relieved its members of their duty, and mandated that they remain at the disposal of the military justice system. The contingent was replaced by another military unit from Sévaré. On 7 July, the Ministry of Defence established a "special commission" to investigate the case and designated the Mopti prosecutor as a military prosecutor and head of the special commission. The Mopti prosecutor opened a criminal investigation. On 5 September, the Mopti prosecutor requested MINUSMA assistance in continuing the investigation, along with members of the special commission, in particular by providing a military forensic medical specialist and national investigators from the judicial investigation service. The prosecutor subsequently travelled to Boulikessi to conduct further investigations, including forensic research. The special commission is currently drafting its conclusions, which will be shared with the Minister of Defence and the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of the technical arrangement.

32. On 20 October 2018, unidentified armed men attacked a Malian armed forces vehicle carrying Malian elements of the Joint Force some 200 metres from the market in Boulikessi, near the border with Burkina Faso, killing one soldier and wounding several others. On October 28 and 1 November, MINUSMA human rights officers visited a group of 14 individuals who had been arrested and transferred to Bamako in connection with the criminal investigation into the incident. The human rights officers will continue to monitor the investigation.

IV. Issues and challenges

33. While G-5 Sahel countries and some donors alike maintained their efforts to swiftly operationalize the Joint Force, as mentioned previously, the full deployment and equipping of troops and the police component continue to be slowed by major training and capability shortfalls, the absence of fortified and secure operational bases and inadequate funding. National security forces in G-5 Sahel countries remain overstretched, as they respond to multiple overlapping security threats and conduct domestic military and security operations. At the same time, while contributing 40 per cent of troops deployed to MINUSMA, the national security forces also participate in a multitude of joint initiatives such as a joint military partnership for transborder cooperation, which has served as a framework for joint border operations among G-5 Sahel countries and the Operation Barkhane force since 2015, the joint Chad-Sudan force, the newly created "G-4" (see paragraph 58 below) and the Multinational Joint Task Force to fight Boko Haram.

34. Considering the above, especially the multiple joint border initiatives among countries in the region, it is necessary to clarify and further develop the Joint Force's strategic concept of operations. Current efforts to operationalize the Joint Force are focused on phase one, which entails joint border operations in the three Sectors. However, such operations had already been carried prior to the establishment of the Joint Force. Furthermore, given the increased mobility and sophistication of terrorist armed groups, it might be more advisable for the long term to have a model aimed at creating a more nimble and flexible network of advanced command posts with

comprehensive early-warning mechanisms, as opposed to static bases that require significant infrastructure investment and funding. In addition, several aspects pertaining to phase one, such as the right to hot pursuit, especially in cases where armed forces might be operating under both national and Joint Force command in the same area, should be clarified, ideally before the Joint Force resumes its operations. In accordance with the strategic concept of operations, there is to be an eventual transition to phase two, which would see the transformation of the Joint Force into a regional counter-terrorism brigade operating under unified command. However, the strategic concept of operations does not include more details on the regional and tactical scope of such a force. In addition, given the vastness of the terrain and the different security challenges facing the G-5 Sahel countries, not all of which are terrorism-related, the further development and clarification of the strategic concept of operations remains a matter of urgency. G-5 Sahel countries will need to show unity of purpose and develop a shared vision to define the end state of the Joint Force, which in turn will bolster donor confidence.

35. Last but not least, the Joint Force continues to lack an overarching institutional framework, which would allow for a more effective translation of political decisions taken at the Head of State or ministerial level into tactical and operational directives. The distribution of roles and responsibilities among the Heads of State summit, the Defence and Security Committee, the Defence and Security Bureau and Joint Force command are not always clearly defined. Also pending is the establishment of a support group for the Joint Force, at the technical and political level, to serve as a platform for exchange and coordination with national, regional and international partners, and as requested by the Security Council in its resolution 2391 (2017).

V. International support for the Joint Force

A. Multilateral support

36. At an international high-level conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels on 23 February 2018, the European Union, its member States and other countries pledged 88 million euros to support the Joint Force, which, when added to previous contributions, brings the total of all pledges received to date to approximately 415.55 million euros. During the reporting period, almost all the needs expressed by the Joint Force in terms of armoured vehicles and individual protection equipment were matched with donor pledges. In addition, several procurement processes have gotten underway and a first batch of equipment has been delivered. The European Union coordination hub is overseeing efforts to match needs with pledges. With regard to infrastructure enhancements, Expertise France submitted a proposal for the reinforcement of Sector West headquarters and for the reconstruction of Joint Force headquarters. Various options for the reinforcement of Sector East headquarters and the new Joint Force headquarters are currently being explored. The table below provides an overview of the pledges received and the status of their disbursement. Of the total amount pledged, 45.9 per cent (approximately 190.76 million euros), has either been disbursed or allocated for procurement processes that are underway. Another 6.1 per cent (around 25.30 million euros) has been earmarked for procurement processes that will begin in the near future. The remaining 199.49 million euros that have been pledged have not yet been earmarked.

Status of funds pledged in support of the Joint Force

(Millions of euros)

Organization country	*Disbursed*	*Disbursement ongoing*	*Request submitted and approved*	*Offer finalized*	*Pledges received*	*Total*
G-5 Sahel			50.00			50.00
European Union	7.94	1.50	63.97	11.60		85.01
European Union countries	7.97	20.08	26.70	1.10	1.03	56.88
Non-European Union countries			12.60	12.60	198.46	223.66
Total	**15.91**	**21.58**	**153.27**	**25.30**	**199.49**	**415.55**

37. Within the framework of the African Peace Facility, the European Union has supported the operationalization of the Joint Force since its inception through an initial contribution of 50 million euros for services, infrastructure and equipment provided through Expertise France. At the international high-level conference on the Sahel, the European Union increased its contribution to a total of 100 million euros. An additional 25 million euros went to Expertise France by which the European Union broadened coverage to include funding for MINUSMA operational and logistical support for the Joint Force (10 million euros), support for OHCHR in implementing the human rights compliance framework (10 million euros) and support for the G-5 Sahel to develop its governance structure (5 million euros).

Support through Expertise France

38. During the reporting period, the Joint Force Commander submitted 12 requests for the provision of services, infrastructure and equipment to Expertise France. Of those, four requests have been validated and implemented by Expertise France (the delivery of 1,050 personal protection equipment kits to the G-5 Sahel countries and the provision of furniture for Joint Force headquarters and two generators). Requests for the procurement of 30 vehicles and the provision of per diems to Joint Force headquarters and Sector headquarters personnel are currently being handled by Expertise France. Proposals for the reinforcement and fortification of Sector West headquarters in Nbeiket el Ahouach, in Mauritania, the provision of anti-improvised explosive device kits and training for specialized personnel, as well as the procurement of 42 unarmed armoured personnel carriers, were developed and submitted by Expertise France, on the basis of Joint Force requests, which were resubmitted to the Joint Force Commander for final validation.

Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework

39. On 20 June 2018, the European Union and OHCHR signed a pillar assessed grant or delegation agreement, by which the modalities for disbursing the European Union's contribution of 10 million euros for the establishment of the human rights compliance framework were determined. The first tranche of funding (5 million euros) has since been transferred to OHCHR, and the first implementation phase is well underway (see section III above).

Support for the development of the G-5 Sahel governance structure

40. The European Union is in the final stages of negotiating a project in support of the G-5 Sahel governance structure with the German development cooperation agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. The project will

likely encompass support for the Sahel Defence College, the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre, the Defence and Security Office of the G-5 Sahel permanent secretariat and the support committee for the G-5 Sahel trust fund.

41. Efforts are underway to establish a trust fund for the G-5 Sahel in Nouakchott. The trust fund has received contributions from Rwanda ($500,000) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (500 million CFA francs, or approximately $867,000), which are being used to establish a support committee for the trust fund. An office has been identified in Nouakchott for the work of the support committee and will host two officers from each G-5 Sahel country. The trust fund has yet to receive the pledges made during the high-level international conference on the Sahel.

B. Bilateral support

42. Seven States members of the European Union channelled contributions through the African Peace Facility that totalled 14.7 million euros: 7.6 million euros (from Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) for the provision of equipment, services and infrastructure through Expertise France, with the remaining 7.1 million (from Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) to be used for the implementation of the compliance framework through OHCHR.

43. In addition, a number of countries continued to provide bilateral assistance to the Joint Force and to the armed forces and security forces of G-5 Sahel countries, in support of national border control and counter-terrorism efforts. The Operation Barkhane force assisted with planning and carrying out the four operations conducted by the Joint Force during the reporting period. France has also provided 12 million euros for training and equipment for the Joint Force and deployed three military advisers to the G-5 Sahel permanent secretariat, the support committee for the G-5 Sahel trust fund, and the Sahel Defence College. Through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France channelled contributions from Czechia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia to provide individual protection and medical equipment worth 440,000 euros to the Joint Force. On 11 September 2018, at the most recent meeting of the European Union coordination hub, the United States of America announced a contribution of $45 million in addition to the $60 million it had already pledged in October 2017. Spain is providing tactical support, including 27.5 flight hours per month and 10.5 tons of cargo per month. Germany is providing bilateral support for equipment, infrastructure and training totally an equivalent of 28 million euros.

C. Support for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

44. Following the signature of the technical arrangement on 23 February 2018 between the G-5 Sahel countries, the European Union and the United Nations, and the pillar assessed grant or delegation agreement between the United Nations and the European Union (providing for the payment to MINUSMA of 10 million euros by the European Union), MINUSMA has put in place all the arrangements necessary to provide operational and logistical support to the Joint Force. On 3 May, the European Union disbursed the first tranche of 5 million euros to the Mission. MINUSMA has developed a mission support plan for the Joint Force, approved on 29 June, by which a joint logistics liaison and coordination cell was established. The Mission, together with the Joint Force, is finalizing a joint annual support plan. MINUSMA also hosts regular tripartite coordination meetings in Bamako with the Joint Force and the European Union. Between May and June, the Mission received nine requests for

support from the Joint Force worth approximately $1.3 million, including support for transport, engineering advisory services, combat rations, fuel, oil and lubricants. MINUSMA responded favourably to all requests. However, owing to the above-mentioned logistical constraints and lack of logistics capabilities in terms of transportation and storage facilities, most of the life support consumables could not be collected by the Joint Force and remain at the Mission's logistics bases.

45. In May 2018, MINUSMA responded favourably to a request to transport 10 G-5 Sahel personnel by air from Mopti, Mali, to Boulikessi, Mali, to investigate the alleged human rights violations referred to in paragraph 30 above. Following the 29 June attack on its central command headquarters in Sévaré, the Joint Force requested the Mission's support in restoring its headquarters communications system. In response, MINUSMA provided emergency communications and information technology equipment on a loan basis.

46. In July 2018, MINUSMA prepared generic engineering and technical designs and scopes of work for the construction and fortification of five camps intended to host the Malian battalions of the Joint Force in Boulikessi, Gomakoura, Guiré, Nampala and Tessit. However, the Joint Force informed the Mission that it no longer required assistance in fortifying the Guiré camp, and instead sought engineering support for the horizontal construction of two 4-hectare and two 10-hectare camps, at a total estimated cost of $12.5 million, as well as for the rehabilitation of the Joint Force's central command headquarters at a new location in Bamako at a total cost of $15 million. In September, following consultations with the Joint Force, the Mission completed a scope of work for the Tessit camp and awaits approval by the Joint Force of the designs for the remaining camps. However, MINUSMA continues to lack the prerequisite funding to carry out construction work in the absence of donor commitments to cover the full range of support measures it has been mandated to provide to the Joint Force pursuant to resolution 2391 (2017). Although the European Union confirmed its willingness, upon formal request from the Mission and with the consent of the Joint Force, to authorize the reallocation of funds channelled to MINUSMA initially earmarked for life support consumables and medical evacuations for use in the construction and fortification of camps, the Mission still lacks approximately $27.5 million to provide its full support package.

D. Funding gaps and challenges

47. While important progress has been made in disbursing pledges received, some 199.49 million euros, nearly half of the total amount pledged to date, have not been earmarked, let alone disbursed, despite the remarkable efforts of the European Union coordination hub in that regard. One year after the Joint Force attained initial operational capacity, lengthy and cumbersome procurement processes have delayed the delivery of urgently required equipment, in particular armoured vehicles and individual protection equipment. MINUSMA continues to face a funding gap of approximately $27.5 million, which has left the Mission unable to provide the engineering support that has been mandated and will contribute to further delays in operationalizing the Joint Force.

VI. Support options going forward

48. In my two previous reports on the Joint Force, I presented options for United Nations support for the Joint Force, ranging from the establishment of a dedicated United Nations office funded through assessed contributions, to the provision more limited assistance through MINUSMA. The Security Council, with its adoption of

resolution 2391 (2017), opted for the latter, namely, the provision of support through MINUSMA, limited to the territory of Mali and relying on the Mission's existing logistics and supply chains.

49. In the present report, I once again urge that a more extensive and comprehensive United Nations support package be developed for the Joint Force, through the establishment of a United Nations support office akin to the United Nations Support Office in Somalia for the African Union Mission in Somalia. While the swift and steadfast commitments made by various donors and partners and the tremendous efforts by the European Union to put in place and manage the coordination hub are commendable, difficulties in generating sustainable and predictable financing, as outlined above, present an important obstacle to the Joint Force's capacity to plan and implement operations beyond a timespan of a few months.

VII. Complementarity with other non-security initiatives

50. The success of the Joint Force is also contingent on an effective, holistic strategy that addresses the root causes of insecurity and instability in the Sahel region. Even after it has attained full operational capability, the Joint Force can only be successful if its efforts are part of a larger, coherent and integrated response, with preventive measures through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Through the recalibrated United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, the United Nations is mobilized to launch a coherent and holistic response that ensures complementarity with other initiatives in the Sahel and helps to strengthen governance, security and development in the region. They encompass, first and foremost, concerted efforts to address governance deficits in the region, through the implementation of inclusive and comprehensive security and justice sector reform and the restoration and expansion of State authority to provide basic security and social services. Several noteworthy initiatives, examples of which are outlined in the following section, are being implemented in G-5 Sahel countries, some of which merit scaling up, while others continue to face challenges related to insecurity. Ultimately, those initiatives should all be implemented under the umbrella of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel in order to ensure synergies and complementarity.

A. National efforts

51. In Mali, on 28 August 2018, following three months of intensive discussions, 34 Dogon and Fulani community leaders from Koro signed an intercommunal peace agreement in Sévaré. They committed to ending more than a year of intercommunal tensions over access to natural resources and to prioritizing the use of traditional mechanisms to prevent and manage disputes. The Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue mediated the negotiation of the agreement at the request of the Government of Mali. Several community leaders from local associations that had not been included in the initiative criticized the agreement for its lack of inclusiveness. However, the communities directly concerned by the agreement expressed their explicit support. That flagship initiative, if implemented successfully, could serve as an example and, if scaled up, it could serve as the foundation for a broader, regional reconciliation and stabilization initiative to foster social cohesion in central Mali. Other social cohesion initiatives supported by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and MINUSMA in Djenné and Mondoro districts in the Mopti region might indeed use Koro as example. MINUSMA, following extensive consultations with key partners and in support of the Government's integrated programme for the stabilization of central Mali, and complementing efforts by the

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, developed a strategy to address the intercommunal conflict in Koro through support for mediation efforts, prevention of violent extremism and strengthening socioeconomic resilience.

52. UN-Women and UNDP are implementing a Peacebuilding Fund project on social cohesion in Ténenkou and Macina districts, in the Ségou region. The project is aimed at strengthening inter- and intra-community dialogue, raising awareness among the population of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and increasing women's participation in the peace process. UNDP, in close collaboration with Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger and with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is also implementing a Peacebuilding Fund-financed project that promotes community safety and social cohesion in the Liptako-Gourma area.

53. In Burkina Faso, the Government's emergency plan for the Sahel foresees investments in infrastructure, energy and public services totalling 700 million euros over three years. In June 2018, the European Union contributed 50 million euros to the programme. Progress has been hindered, however, by the deteriorating security situation in the north.

54. UNODC continues to support domestic efforts on the part of G-5 Sahel countries to counter organized crime and terrorism. Recently, with the assistance of UNODC, Mauritania adopted an action plan for countering terrorism. In Burkina Faso, University Ouaga II developed the region's first professional master's programme on anti-corruption, open to students from across West Africa, covering various perspectives on corruption, including economic, legal and social aspects. The programme will begin in the third quarter of 2018. Mali adopted a new national action plan to combat trafficking in persons for the period 2018–2022. In the Niger, 2.5 tons of cannabis were seized following surveillance by a joint airport interdiction task force at Niamey's international airport. Chad ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

B. Efforts under the G-5 Sahel priority investment plan

55. In the margins of the thirty-first ordinary summit of the African Union, the G-5 Sahel held an extraordinary summit of Heads of State in Nouakchott on 2 July 2018. At the extraordinary summit, attended by all five Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries, in addition to President Macron of France and the Chair of the African Union Commission, the Security Council was urged to approve a Chapter VII mandate for the Joint Force and to accelerate the establishment of the G-5 Sahel trust fund. The leaders also condemned the 29 June attack on the headquarters of the Joint Force in Sévaré and decided to enhance its physical security. It also called for the harmonization of the G-5 Sahel priority investment plan and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, and the alignment of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel with the African Union strategy for the Sahel region.

56. As part of its stated objective to complement military interventions with development initiatives, the G-5 Sahel has been promoting partnerships to accelerate the implementation of its priority investment plan and to focus development interventions on areas where the most vulnerable communities live. On 30 October 2018, the G-5 Sahel Council of Ministers and the Sahel Alliance signed a letter of cooperation to implement an emergency programme for the rehabilitation of local infrastructure in border areas. The programme consists of rural water projects for communities and cattle herders, along with initiatives to promote social cohesion, access to justice and improved community safety in vulnerable border locations. The

portfolio of the priority investment plant was also revised. It now covers the period 2019–2021 and consists of 40 projects worth 1.9 billion euros. There are 27 infrastructure-related projects, with another 13 projects worth 767.63 million euros addressing the areas of governance, security and resilience. Seven of those projects are joint United Nations G-5 Sahel initiatives. The portfolio is expected to be presented on 6 December at a donor coordination conference in Nouakchott organized with the assistance of the United Nations and the European Union.

57. As part of its efforts to enhance the capacity of it security forces and improve operational readiness, the Sahel Defense College, based in Nouakchott, opened its doors to its first group of officers on 15 October 2018, following a successful training-of-trainers session on 30 June for course instructors from Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. Its operational budget for the period 2018–2019 was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the G-5 Sahel countries. The Government of Mali provided a building in Bamako to house the Sahel Security College, which offers a wide range of short courses for civilians and security personnel on security-related issues, and has so far trained 366 gendarmes, magistrates, policemen, park rangers, border guards and civilians from G-5 Sahel countries. Its courses focus on capacity-building in respect of the role of judicial police, border security and training course design. In follow up to the decision at the G-5 Sahel summit of Heads of State to create a police academy, the Government of Chad nominated a focal person to liaise with the G-5 Sahel permanent secretariat to determine the related operational modalities and resource mobilization strategy.

C. United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

58. The United Nations has increased its efforts to respond to the multifaceted challenges facing the Sahel, including through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Those efforts are anchored in a strong resilience-building approach as part of the long-term development agenda for achieving peace and security in the region. On the margins of the thirty-first ordinary summit of the African Union, the United Nations presented a recalibrated strategy and launched the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. The Plan is aimed at better addressing the humanitarian-development nexus and its linkages to peace through a multisectoral, integrated and comprehensive approach to ensure greater coordination of collective action in the field. The Plan also aims at promoting synergies and complementarity among the strategies of the key partners, including the G-5 Sahel, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the European Union and the Sahel Alliance, through a more global, coherent and integrated approach, while considering the policies, priorities and needs of each of the 10 Sahelian countries.

59. Ensuring ownership and leadership on the part of the countries of the Sahel and strengthening national and regional institutions, including the G-5 Sahel, is a key priority of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. The United Nations has been active in providing support to the permanent secretariat of the G-5 Sahel. On 7 November 2018, my Special Adviser for the Sahel co-hosted a workshop with the regional heads of United Nations system entities in West Africa that brought together representatives of the G-5 Sahel permanent secretariat and United Nations entities working on the Sahel to further enhance harmonization between the priority investment plan and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and to align priorities ahead of the donor coordination conference in December.

D. Regional and subregional initiatives

60. A new military partnership operating in the G-5 Sahel region was established on 31 May 2018 when Chad, Libya, the Niger and the Sudan (the "G-4") signed an agreement to jointly monitor and secure the borders among them, with a view to combating terrorism, illegal migration, human trafficking and other forms of cross-border crime.

61. On 30 July 2018, the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS and ECCAS member States met in Lomé for their first summit, which saw also the participation of the G-5 Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. The Heads of State welcomed the commitment of countries that are members of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the G-5 Sahel Joint Force to the fight against terrorism and called upon all members States of the two economic communities to provide, in a spirit of inter-community solidarity, material, financial, technical and intelligence support to the armed forces of member States in the fight against terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel. They further requested the Security Council to place the G-5 Sahel Joint Force under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to provide it with sustainable and multilateral funding.

62. During the reporting period, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC, together with the African Union and United Nations partners, including IOM and UNDP, supported the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in developing a stabilization strategy for the subregion (involving Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria) pursuant to Security Council resolution 2349 (2017). Two subregional conferences, held in N'Djamena from 10 to 13 April and from 11 to 19 July 2018, enabled the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission to articulate and agree on a common approach to the treatment of persons associated with Boko Haram, pursuant to Council resolutions 2178 (2014), 2349 (2017) and 2396 (2017), in which the Council requested the development of comprehensive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. The substance of those discussions became a pillar of the Commission's regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of areas in the Lake Chad Basin affected by Boko Haram activities, which was adopted on 30 August. Efforts will now focus on promoting awareness of the strategy among relevant national and regional stakeholders and on strengthening interagency cooperation among the Multinational Joint Task Force, national military forces and the criminal justice and civilian agencies that are necessary for its effective implementation.

VIII. Observations

63. Some progress has been made since the establishment of the Joint Force in April 2017. I welcome the commitments and determination of the G-5 Sahel countries to overcome the many challenges they face in operationalizing the Joint Force. The heinous and brutal attack on the headquarters of the Joint Force could have been a devastating blow to this nascent initiative. Yet, in the face of adversity, the G-5 Sahel countries have persevered. Even without the crucial equipment, infrastructure and full support that it required, and with its personnel scattered across multiple locations, the new leadership of the Joint Force has continued its work with professionalism and determination. Reports that the Joint Force's operations will resume in December 2018 are encouraging and will send an important signal to adversaries that the Joint Force will not give up.

64. However, while progress has been made, much remains to be done and the obstacles that need to be overcome are manifold and complex. I urge the G-5 Sahel countries to

accelerate efforts to deploy all outstanding troops and to fully establish the police component. Similarly, the G-5 Sahel countries need to step up their efforts to finalize the Joint Force's strategic concept of operations. Providing clarity on the desired end state of the Joint Force would not only serve to demonstrate unity of purpose but would also bolster donor confidence in this important initiative. I also urge donors to accelerate procedures to deploy the needed equipment. The lack of armoured vehicles and protection equipment, in particular, has hampered the Joint Force's capacity to operate.

65. The engagement of the senior levels of command of the Joint Force and the commitment of the G-5 Sahel countries to implementing the compliance framework is encouraging. I commend the efforts made thus far and call upon the Joint Force Commander and his staff to continue the positive steps they have taken to date. Sustained implementation of the compliance framework by the Joint Force will contribute to the prevention of violations and address the drivers of the conflict. Indeed, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law will be a key determining factor in the success of the Joint Force.

66. I am pleased to note the efforts undertaken in operationalizing the police component of the Joint Force in operations related to fighting terrorism and transnational organized crime. The police component has an integral role in the implementation of the Joint Force's compliance framework and in investigating allegations of human rights violations by members of the Joint Force.

67. I remain deeply concerned by the multifaceted challenges in the Sahel. The spread of insecurity and terrorism to other parts of the region, including into eastern Burkina Faso, is particularly worrying. Rebel attacks in eastern Chad indicate that borders are becoming more porous, and the vastness and inhospitability of the terrain poses serious challenges. Terrorism is a scourge that humanity will grapple with for the foreseeable future. Terrorism continues to have devastating effects on lives and livelihoods, depriving entire communities of access not only to basic social services, but also to long-term opportunities and perspectives. Our response, as the international community, must be as agile and multifaceted as the threats we face. The countries of the Sahel will require the support of all their regional and international partners to ensure that the expanding terrorism threat receives urgent attention, including though the provision of development aid to counter the impact of poverty and despair in providing fertile ground for terrorism.

68. As the Joint Force steps up its actions against terrorism, it will be critical to win the minds and hearts of the populations concerned. Addressing violent extremism and terrorism through security measures is essential, but must be accompanied by development programmes, civilian capacity-building activities, including in areas such as human rights, gender equality and development.

69. The Joint Force needs to be supported by a broader political and institutional framework that can guide its operations, ensure alignment with a broader regional strategy and simultaneously help to translate strategic decisions into operational and tactical measures. Establishing a support group for the Joint Force, which I have called for to be urgently established in my previous two reports on this matter, will help to solidify the institutional framework of the Joint Force, reinforce links between the support group and the African Union, including through the Nouakchott Process, and ensure that it is an integral part of the African Peace and Security Architecture. Indeed, reinforcing partnerships and strengthening the role of the African Union, in line with my Action For Peacekeeping initiative, will be instrumental to enhancing coordination and information-sharing with other regional initiatives, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force. I encourage the members of the Security Council to *address this during their upcoming debate on African-led peace operations.*

70. I applaud the leadership of the European Union in managing the coordination hub and commend all stakeholders involved for their willingness to collaborate. I fully welcome the European Union's expressed intention to transfer the coordination hub to the offices of the G-5 Sahel in Nouakchott once it has built the capacity to receive and host it. My deepest gratitude also goes to all donors who have contributed generously to the Joint Force, as well as to my Special Representative for Mali, Annadif Mahamat Saleh, and MINUSMA colleagues for their steadfast support for the Joint Force. However, the absence of sufficient funding, especially for MINUSMA engineering support, has limited its capacity to provide assistance to the Joint Force and emphasized the limits of the existing support model. I urge donors and the international community to come forward and to provide MINUSMA with the funds it so urgently requires. I also call upon those donors who have made pledges but not earmarked them to match them with existing needs and to disburse the funds pledged as quickly as possible.

71. Given the challenges encountered to date in generating the required pledges, in disbursing the funds pledged in a timely manner, and the impact that has had on delivering support on the ground, it is my conviction that the support measures and the funding mechanism put in place must be revisited. Expanding the scope, both geographically and in terms of the support provided, of the tripartite technical arrangement between the G-5 Sahel countries, the European Union and the United Nations could be one option to generate assistance for the Joint Force, once it becomes fully operational.

72. I remain convinced, however, that only a United Nations support office, funded through assessed contributions and independent of MINUSMA, will allow for predictable and sustainable financing of support for the Joint Force, longer-term planning and the consolidation of this important initiative, as stated in my previous reports. I once again call upon the members of the Security Council to be more ambitious in the mandate it bestows upon the Joint Force, and I echo calls by leaders from the region to place the Joint Force under a Chapter VII mandate. While I would like to recall that such a mandate does not guarantee automatic funding through assessed contributions, it would provide the Joint Force with the additional political legitimacy that this important initiative deserves.

73. Weak governance and neglect by the State, underdevelopment, socioeconomic exclusion and inequality, exacerbated by climate change and a growing population, remain at the core of instability in the region. Considering that one of the root causes of the crisis stems from people's perception of exclusion and injustice, a military solution alone is not enough to create durable peace and stability. As such, a successful outcome of the Malian peace process remains the cornerstone of stabilization efforts in the region. If the international community does not sufficiently invest in addressing the root causes of the conflict and support recovery and development in northern and central Mali, peace and security will remain elusive. As outlined in the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, scaling up access to basic services and job opportunities in Mali and other Sahelian countries is also necessary to reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance.

74. We must strengthen the nexus between security and development actions to ensure long-term stability in the Sahel region. Doing so requires unity of purpose and adequate resources. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel provide a comprehensive framework for strengthening governance, security and development in the region. I will continue to use my good offices, including through my Special Representative for West Africa and my Special Adviser for the Sahel, who have been tasked with spearheading the implementation of the integrated strategy and the Plan, to ensure continued United Nations support in the region.